

136 COMMENTARY ON MACAULAY'S
HISTORY

their property-qualification bill, which
required county
members to possess ≥ 600 a year in land and
borough members
 ≥ 300 a year, and this law remained in
force till 1838.¹
Macaulay related only the first stage of the
struggle ; if
he had completed his History he would
probably have
dwelt on the social as well as political results
of the rise of
the commercial class. A Swiss who visited
England in
1694 remarked on the difference between
English and
foreign merchants.

They seem to me to differ from other
merchants in many
things ; they are neither in so much haste as
the French to
grow rich, nor so niggardly as the Dutch to
save ; their
houses are richly furnished, and their tables
well served ;
none can out-do a merchant in good eating, if
he makes it
his business, and 'tis, no doubt, this
sumptuous way of
living that obliges them to sell their goods at
dear rates, for
being accustomed to great expenses, they
despise small gain.
There's something very singular in their
character, and
which, in my opinion, distinguishes them still
more from
other merchants ; no sooner do they acquire
wealth, but
they quit traffick, and turn country
gentlemen.²

In this way, the ranks of the landed gentry
were continually recruited from the cities as they long
had been from
the law courts : there was no permanent
barrier between
one section of the community and another,

and this blending of interests made the governing classes more representative of the nation, strengthened the basis of the state, and assured the gains of the Revolution.

¹ F. W. Wyon, *History of Great Britain during the Reign of Queen Anne* (1876), ii. 283 ; Examiner, Mar. 29 and June 7, 1711 ; E. and A. G. Porritt, *Unreformed House of Commons* (1903), i. 166-81.

² B. L. Muralt, *Letters Describing the Character and Customs of the English* (tr, 1726), p. 9, Cf. Burnet, *Own Time*, ii. 652 : 'As for the men of trade and business, they are, generally speaking, the best body in the nation, generous, sober, and charitable/